

Subjective Happiness Scale

1. In general, I consider myself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not a very happy person						a very happy person

2. Compared with most of my peers, I consider myself:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
less happy						more happy

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						a great deal

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
not at all						a great deal

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WHAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE MEASURES

The SHS is a 4-item scale of global subjective happiness. Two items ask respondents to characterize themselves using both absolute ratings and ratings relative to peers, whereas the other two items offer brief descriptions of happy and unhappy individuals and ask respondents the extent to which each characterization describes them. The SHS has been validated in 14 studies with a total of 2,732 participants. Data has been collected in the United States from students on two college campuses and one high school campus, from community adults in two California cities, and from older adults, as well as from students and community adults in Moscow, Russia. Results have indicated that the SHS has high internal consistency, which has been found to be stable across samples. Test-retest and self-peer correlations have suggested good to excellent reliability, and construct validation studies of convergent and discriminant validity have confirmed the use of this scale to measure the construct of subjective happiness.

SCORING

Add up your scores for the four questions and divide the total by four. That answer is your “subjective happiness score.” Answers range from 1 to 7. Question 4 is “reverse coded” with a descending sequence.

INTERPRETATION

The average score runs from about 4.5 to 5.5, depending on the group. College students tend to score lower (averaging a bit below 5) than working adults and older, retired people (who average 5.6). If you’re past college age, and your happiness score is lower than 5.6, then you’re less happy than the average person. To put it another way, more than 50 percent of people in our age group rate themselves higher on the scale. If your score is greater than 5.6, then you’re happier than the average person. Of course, what the “average person” is for you will depend on your gender, your age, your occupation, ethnicity, etc. But what’s important to remember is that no matter what your score is, you can become happier.

KEY REFERENCES

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